Right Heart Catheterization
How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how to prepare and what to expect when you are scheduled for a right heart catheterization at UW Medical Center (UWMC).

Your Appointment
Your test is scheduled for:

Date: __________________________
Time: __________________________

On the day of your test:
- First go to Blood Draw on the 3rd floor of the hospital for routine pre-procedure labs.
- Then check in at Admitting Reception on the 3rd floor.

Please be on time so that we can fully prepare you for your procedure. Your test will be done in the Cardiac Catheterization Lab. See page 8 for driving directions, maps, and parking information.

We will do our best to start your test on time. But, please be patient if emergencies in the hospital cause a delay.

How to Prepare
- You cannot eat for 6 hours before your test. You may also need to stop taking some of your medicines for a short time. Follow the “Fasting” and “Medicines” instructions under “Day of Your Test” on page 5.
- Talk with the nurse by phone before your test. A Cardiac Procedures nurse should call you 3 to 7 days before your test. The nurse will review your medicine list and ask if you have any allergies. You may be told not to take some medicines the day of your test, so it is very important for the nurse to review your full medicine list.
- If you do not receive this phone call by 3 days before your appointment, call 206.598.8435 for instructions.

- If you do not talk with the nurse by phone, we will need to review your medicines and allergies when you arrive for your test.

- **If you take the medicine warfarin (Coumadin):** Before your test, please talk with the provider who prescribed this medicine for you. You will need specific instructions about when or if you should stop taking it.

**Phone Numbers**

- To speak with a Cardiac Procedures nurse, call 206.598.8435.

- To reschedule or cancel your test, call 206.598.8200.

**About This Test**

Your provider has referred you for a *right heart catheterization*. This test shows how well the right side of your heart moves blood from your body into your lungs. This test will help your doctor diagnose certain problems in your heart or lungs.

During the test, X-ray and ultrasound images may be used to see details of your heart. The pressures inside your heart will also be measured. Your doctor will study this information to see how well your heart’s chambers, valves, and other structures are working.

**What to Expect**

**Placing the Sheath**

Your doctor will first place a *sheath* (short hollow tube) into your vein. Most times, the sheath is placed in a *jugular vein* in the neck (see drawing below). Very rarely, a different vein is used. The vein that is used will affect how long you need to stay in the hospital after your test.

When the sheath is placed, you may feel pressure, but you should not feel pain. If you have any pain, please tell your doctor.

![Diagram of catheter placement](image)

*For this test, a catheter (tube) will be inserted into a vein, most likely a jugular vein in your neck.*
Pulmonary Artery Catheter

After blood flows through your body, it returns to the right side of your heart. It then gets pumped into your pulmonary artery, the main artery that carries blood to your lungs.

After the sheath is placed, your doctor will put a pulmonary artery catheter (a long, thin tube) through the sheath. The catheter will be moved into the right side of your heart.

As the catheter is moved through your heart, your doctor will measure pressures inside your right atrium and right ventricle (see drawing at left).

Your doctor will also measure pressures on the left side of your heart. This is done by inflating a tiny balloon at the tip of the catheter after it reaches your pulmonary artery.

Heart Medicines

This test is often done to check how well the medicine you are already on is working. It may also be done to help your doctor decide what medicine you should be taking.

The provider who referred you for this test will be given the results right away. Please follow up with this referring provider, not the doctor who did the test.

Heart Monitoring

The right heart catheter is sometimes left in place to monitor how different heart medicines are working. This may be done if the blood output from your heart is too low, or the pressures in your heart and lungs are too high. This monitoring helps your doctor find the best medicine to improve your heart’s function.

If you are being monitored in this way, you will stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) overnight or for a few days. Your length of stay will depend on your condition and how long your doctor wants you to be monitored.

Before You Come to the Hospital

Being prepared for your hospital visit will help make your stay as comfortable as possible. Here are some things you should know:

- You may need to stop taking some of your medicines for a short time before your test. Most times, you will be able to start taking them again after the test. The nurse who calls you will tell you if you need to make any changes in your medicines.
• We will not know until after your test whether you will be able to go home later the same day or will need to stay overnight in the hospital.
  – Most patients leave the hospital the same day. But, we advise you to pack a small bag in case you need to stay overnight.
  – If you do not live in the Seattle area, you may want to make a hotel or motel reservation, or make other plans for a place to stay the night after your procedure.

**Sedation and Local Anesthetic**

Before this test, you will need to decide if you want to receive:

• **Only local anesthetic.** This medicine will numb the area where the sheath is inserted. You will be fully awake during the test. If you have only local anesthetic:
  – You can return to your usual activities after your test.
  – You may drive yourself home and will not need to have someone stay with you there.

• **Both local anesthetic and sedation.** Sedation will make you relaxed and sleepy during the test. If you have both sedation and local anesthetic:
  – You must have an IV line inserted.
  – You cannot drive for 24 hours after your test.
  – You **must** have a responsible adult take you home after your test and stay with you for at least 6 hours. This person must be waiting for you before you are allowed to leave the procedure area. (See “Leaving the Hospital” on page 7.)

Most patients do not have sedation for this test, and do not have any complaints during or after the test.

**What to Bring to the Hospital**

Please bring these items with you on the day of your test:

• **A list of all medicines you now take.** For all medicines, write down the dose and how often you take each one. Include all non-prescription products such as multivitamins, other vitamins, and herbal supplements.

• **Any other medicines, including vitamins and supplements, you have taken in the last 2 days.**

• **If you are having sedation, the name and phone number of your contact person and the person who will take you home.** This may be the same person. This person must be with you when you receive instructions before you leave the hospital.
Day of Your Test

Fasting

• **Do not eat or drink anything for at least 6 hours before your procedure.** You may have a light meal or snack if you finish eating it at least 6 hours before your check-in time.

  - For example, a light snack of tea and toast is OK, but do not eat high-fat foods such as bacon, sausage, or eggs for at least 8 hours before your check-in time.

• Most patients tell us that having something to eat and drink very early in the morning makes the day go more smoothly, lowers their stress, and improves their general mood. Try eating a light snack early in the morning if you wake up and it is more than 6 hours before your test. Or, you might set an alarm to wake up early enough to be able to eat a small meal.

Medicines

• The Cardiac Procedures nurse will review all your medicines and tell you if there are any that you should not take before this test.

• Most medicines do not have to be stopped before this test. If you do not need to make any changes to your medicines, take your usual morning medicines with small sips of water.

In the Cardiac Procedures Unit

After checking in at the Admitting Reception window, take the Pacific elevators to the 2nd floor. Then go to the Cardiac Procedures Unit Nurse’s Station (see map at left). When you arrive:

• You will change into a hospital gown.

• Your blood pressure and other vital signs will be taken.

• You will have a blood draw.

• A nurse will review your health history. This includes a review of any allergies you may have and your medicine list.

• An electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) may be done, if your doctor has ordered one. This painless test measures the electrical activity of your heart.

• If you have chosen to have sedation, an intravenous (IV) line will be inserted in a vein in your arm.

• You will meet with the doctor who will be doing your test. Your doctor will explain the test to you and talk with you about risks and side effects. Please be sure to ask any questions you have about the test.
• You will be asked to sign a consent form that gives us permission to do your test. You may decide not to sign the form. The test will not be done if you do not give your consent by signing the form.

• You may have 1 or 2 family members wait with you in the Cardiac Procedures Unit. During your test, your family may wait in a nearby waiting area.

**In the Catheterization Lab**

• We will help you get onto a special table that slides back and forth. A camera will be above the table. If needed, this table and camera help your doctor see the blood vessels and chambers of your heart from different angles.

• *Electrodes* will be attached to your skin with a gel. They will monitor your heart rhythms.

• You will be covered with *sterile* (germ-free) paper sheets.

• If you received sedation, you will start to feel relaxed and sleepy.

• Your neck will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution. It may also be shaved, if needed. This will help prevent infection.

• **Always ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or do not understand any part of your test.**

**After Your Test**

After your test, you will be taken back to the Cardiac Procedures Unit. If you had sedation, you may stay there for a short time to recover.

• If your doctor decides you do not need recovery time or if you have not had sedation, a nurse will give you instructions and you will be able to leave the hospital.

• If you need recovery time, your blood pressure and vital signs will be checked often.

**Leaving the Hospital**

If you did **not** have sedation, you may drive yourself home after the test.

If you had sedation for your test:

- You cannot drive yourself home or take a bus or taxi by yourself. You must have a **responsible adult** go with you from the procedure area and take you home.

- The adult who is going home with you must be with you to hear and understand your discharge instructions.

- It is best for the adult to stay with you for **at least 6 hours**.
Activity Restrictions

If you had sedation, for 24 hours after your test:

- Do **not** drive.
- Do **not** be responsible for the care of anyone (such as children or an adult who needs care).
- Do **not** drink alcohol, or take drugs other than those prescribed or recommended by your providers.
- Do not make important decisions or sign important papers.

For all patients:

- Return to light activity the day of your test, as you are able.
- Return to your regular activity 24 hours after your test, as you are able.
- You may shower 24 hours after your test and remove the bandage on your neck. After you shower:
  - You may put an adhesive bandage over the area. Leave it on for a few days while your incision heals.
  - Remove the bandage every day and check for signs of infection.
- You will receive instructions on pain control after surgery. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions.
- Take your usual medicines as prescribed, or make changes as instructed by your provider.
- You may eat as usual unless you have been told to change your diet.
- **Call your primary care provider if you have:**
  - Redness around the incision site
  - Fever higher than 101.5 F (38.6 C)
  - Drainage from the site
  - Change in bruising, or a lump

Who to Call for Help

- **If you have sudden, heavy or severe bleeding, or a lot of swelling, put pressure on the site and call 911.**
- If you have questions or concerns about your test:
  - Call the Cardiac Procedures Unit at 206.598.7146 weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
  - For urgent concerns related to this procedure, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the Cardiology I Fellow on call to be paged. Be sure to give a phone number where you can be reached. The Cardiology I Fellow will call you back.
Questions?
Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.
Cardiac Procedures Nurse Coordinator: 206.598.8435

Driving Directions
UWMC is at 1959 N.E. Pacific Street, at the south end of the University of Washington campus (see map at left).

From Interstate 5:
Take Exit 168B (Bellevue, SR 520) heading east. Next, take the Montlake Blvd. Exit. Turn left onto Montlake Blvd. After crossing the bridge, turn left onto Pacific Street. UWMC is on your left. To park in the Triangle Garage, take the next right onto N.E. Pacific Place.

From Interstate 405:
Take Exit 14 (Seattle via Evergreen Point Bridge, SR 520) heading west. Then take the Montlake Blvd. Exit. Veer right onto Montlake Blvd. After crossing the bridge, turn left onto Pacific Street. UWMC is on your left. To park in the Triangle Garage, take the next right onto N.E. Pacific Place.

Parking
Triangle Parking Garage
The Triangle Garage is on N.E. Pacific Place, across the street from the hospital (see star on the map at left). It is underground. A walking tunnel connects the garage to the hospital’s main entrance.

Parking in the Triangle Garage can be validated with a sticker to reduce your cost. Bring your parking ticket with you to the hospital. Ask for a validation sticker when you check in for your test.

Valet Parking
There is a valet parking service at the main entrance to the hospital. Valets will park your car weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The cost for valet parking is the same as parking in the Triangle Garage.